Lapid Times

30th October 2020

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What in the world if Trump wins?

The Wall Street Journal

Walter Russell Mead

The odds are against him again, but Donald Trump has every intention of winning four more years in office. In foreign policy at least, his second term would likely be even more transformative and unconventional than his first.

Most second-term presidents look to make a mark in foreign policy. This is partly because a president's political clout at home diminishes as the definitive end of his mandate approaches, while overseas a president has a relatively free hand even at the end of a second term.

So commanders in chief often go looking for diplomatic breakthroughs. Bill Clinton and George W. Bush both devoted great efforts to getting an Israeli-Palestinian agreement in their second terms. Barack Obama signed the Iran deal and the Paris Climate Accords. As unconventional a figure as Mr. Trump is, he is likely to look for trophy achievements overseas too.

Second-term presidents have another important trait: They tend to trust their instincts more. Getting elected once might mean you are lucky; getting elected twice must mean you are good.

Mr. Trump has never been a shrinking violet when it comes to trusting his instincts. If he shocks the experts by holding the White House, he will be even more convinced that his methods and beliefs are right. Brimming with self-confidence and increasingly eager to make a mark in foreign affairs, Mr. Trump will return to his old agenda with new energy—and renewed contempt for the foreign-policy establishments here and abroad that despise him.

Mr. Trump's second term would probably be driven by a quest for "deals," transactional bargains with other leaders, even more so than in his first term. This could be disconcerting to those around him working to create the institutional basis for a long-term approach to the rise of China and security in the Indo-Pacific. For Mr. Trump, it is all leverage, and for the right deal he will

make large and unconventional concessions. China, Russia, Iran, North Korea, Venezuela: Mr. Trump's policy is likely to be a quest for dramatic if not always substantive or enduring deals.

This has several consequences. It reinforces Mr. Trump's relative indifference to human-rights-based diplomacy. It strengthens his preference for diplomacy between sovereign states as opposed to multilateral rule-making and intensifies his impatience with international institutions. It will lead him to continue to seek good personal relationships with even the most controversial and adversarial figures on the world stage.

A second term would be at least as chaotic as the first. This is not simply because the president is undisciplined and indifferent to process and bases his decisions on intuition more than analysis.

For Mr. Trump, chaos is more than a choice or even a habit. It is a tool for keeping ultimate control in his own hands. That a presidential tweet can at any moment reverse a policy that aides have labored over for months infuriates, alienates and not infrequently humiliates his subordinates, but Mr. Trump stays in control. Keeping your associates and adversaries alike guessing is, in the president's playbook, a tactic for success. Officials can always be replaced; power needs to be conserved.

With most neoconservatives and traditional Republican internationalists gone, the GOP foreign-policy world consists largely of dovish restrainers in the mold of Rand Paul and hawkish unilateralists like Tom Cotton. The factions disagree over what an America First foreign policy should look like.

For some Paulites even the challenge of China is not enough to justify another generation of a global defense and alliance policy. Japan has enough plutonium for thousands of nuclear weapons. Why should the U.S. pay the bills for Asian defense when Tokyo, Seoul and others have what it takes to contain Beijing on their own?

Cottonites believe that the China challenge and the continuing threat of terrorism, among other worries, require American tech and defense supremacy. They see forward defense as smarter than waiting for adversaries to attack the U.S.

Whatever his deepest instincts—which are probably more Paulite than Cottonesque—Mr. Trump likely sees keeping a balance between the two factions as part of his strategy for dominating Republican politics. He sometimes tilts one way and sometimes another, probably with the goal of keeping both sides competing for his favor. It has worked for him so far.

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Trump killed the Pax Americana

The New York Times

Paul Krugman

There are, I suppose, some people who still imagine that if and when Donald Trump leaves office we'll see a rebirth of civility and cooperation in U.S. politics. They are, of course, hopelessly naïve. America in the 2020s will remain a deeply polarized nation, rife with crazy conspiracy theories and, quite possibly, plagued by right-wing terrorism.

But that won't be Trump's legacy. The truth is that we were already well down that road before he came along. And on the other side, if the Democrats win big, I expect to see many of Trump's substantive policies reversed, and then some. Environmental protection and the social safety net will probably end up substantially stronger, taxes on the rich substantially higher, than they were under Barack Obama.

Trump's lasting legacy, I suspect, will come in international affairs. For almost 70 years America played a special role in the world, one that no nation had ever played before. We've now lost that role, and I don't see how we can ever get it back.

You see, American dominance represented a new form of superpower hegemony.

Our government's behavior was by no means saintly; we did some terrible things, supporting dictators and undermining democracies from Iran to Chile. And sometimes it seemed as if one of our main goals was to make the world safe for multinational corporations.

But we weren't a crude exploiter, pillaging other countries for our own gain. The Pax Americana arguably dated from the enactment of the Marshall Plan in 1948; that is, from the moment when a conquering nation chose to help its defeated foes rebuild rather than demanding that they pay tribute.

And we were a country that kept its word.

To take the area I know best, the United States took the lead in creating a rules-based system for international trade. The rules were designed to fit American ideas about how the world should work, placing limits on the ability of governments to intervene in markets. But once the rules were in place, we followed them ourselves. When the World Trade Organization ruled against the United States, as it did for example in the case of George W. Bush's steel tariffs, the U.S. government accepted that judgment.

We also stood by our allies. We might have trade or other disputes with Germany or South Korea, but nobody considered the possibility that America would stand aside if either country was invaded.

Trump changed all that.

What, for example, is the point of a rules-based trading system when the system's creator and erstwhile guardian imposes tariffs based on transparently bad-faith arguments — such as the claim that imports of aluminum from Canada (!) threaten national security?

How useful is America as an ally when the president suggests that he might not defend European nations because, in his judgment, they don't spend enough on NATO?

Is America still the leader of the free world when top officials seem friendlier to nations like Hungary, where democracy has effectively collapsed — or even to murderous autocracies like Saudi Arabia — than to longstanding democratic allies?

Now, if Trump is defeated, a Biden administration will probably do its best to restore America's traditional role in the world. We'll start following trade rules; we'll rejoin the Paris climate accord and rescind plans to withdraw from the World Health Organization. We'll assure our allies that we have their backs, and rebuild alliances with other democracies.

But even with the best will in the world, this egg can't be unscrambled. No matter how good a global citizen America becomes in the next few years, everyone will remember that we're a country that elected someone like Donald Trump, and could do it again. It will take decades if not generations to regain the lost trust.

The effects may, at first, be subtle. Other countries probably won't rush to confront a Biden administration. There might even be a sort of global honeymoon, as the world breathes a sigh of relief.

But the loss of trust in America will gradually have a corrosive effect. A trade expert once said to me that the great danger, if America turns protectionist, wouldn't be retaliation, it would be emulation: If we ignore the rules, other countries will follow our example. The same will be true on other fronts. There will be more economic and military bullying of small countries by their larger neighbors. There will be more blatant election-rigging in nominally democratic nations.

In other words, even if Trump goes, the world will become a more dangerous, less fair place than it was, because everyone will wonder and worry whether the United States has become the kind of country where such things can happen again.

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The U.S. Middle East strategy's missing piece is Iraq

Foreign Policy

Mina Al-Oraibi

One critical foreign policy issue that has been almost entirely absent from the U.S. election debate is Iraq—and with it, the U.S. role in the wider Middle East.

The United States' place in the world has been greatly shaped over the last 17 years by its presence in Iraq. Former U.S. President George W. Bush oversaw the start of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq with a set of decisions that made them into "forever wars." His successor, President Barack Obama, ran on a platform of bringing troops home from Iraq. Most U.S. soldiers were duly withdrawn by December 2011, even as Obama and then-Vice President Joe Biden ignored the ongoing civil strife in the country. But they could not ignore Iraq for long: By 2014, U.S. troops were back in Iraq to fight the Islamic State.

Today, the United States is on course to draw down its troops once again—from 5,200 to 3,000 by the end of this year. No matter who wins the election next week, that number is unlikely to go back up, barring a major development such as the emergence of another international terrorist organization that threatens to destabilize the region.

But there is every reason for Washington to stay engaged in Iraq, provided that this engagement is no longer measured by the number of its troops. Since leading a global coalition to remove Saddam Hussein's regime in 2003, the United States continues to enjoy great influence in a country that is a linchpin of any U.S. strategy in the Middle East, not least due to the border it shares with Iran, Jordan, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Syria, and Turkey. Furthermore, Iraq has one of the world's largest reserves of hydrocarbons, whose free flow will be essential to global economic growth for years to come.

Most Iraqis believe that the United States could help them overturn years of instability, internal conflict, and corruption. Whether this is realistic or not, a reengaged United States could provide the political and economic support to sway Baghdad towards the political pluralism and liberal market policies that are needed in the Middle East.

Iraq matters not only because of its economic and strategic potential, but also because of Iran. For better or worse, U.S. policies towards Iran spill into Iraq. When Washington ramped up sanctions on Iran, Iran increased its economic pressure on Iraq. And if Washington hopes to limit Tehran's network of militias and armed groups in the region, it must do so in Iraq.

While both U.S. President Donald Trump and Biden have said that they are interested in reaching a deal with Iran, the nature of that deal will impact Iraq. Many Iraqis fear that a Biden administration would seek to revert to the Iranian nuclear agreement without restricting the activities of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps and its proxies in Iraq. Similarly, they fear that a second Trump presidency could see a rush to strike a deal at almost any price that also fails to take Iraq's fate into account. Both kinds of deals would shortchange Iraq—and the United States' own strategic interests as well.

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Twitter's censorship method

The Wall Street Journal

Editorial Board

What a depressing spectacle. On Wednesday the Senate Commerce Committee held a hearing on online speech, questioning the CEOs of Twitter, Facebook and Google. Twitter's Jack Dorsey was the focus, two weeks after his company launched a crackdown against independent journalists to protect Joe Biden from public scrutiny. Twitter blocked all links to a New York Post story on Hunter Biden's business dealings, and the Post's account remains locked to this day.

The dazed-looking Mr. Dorsey gave the impression he could not care less about his company's abuse. Democratic Senators cheered on politicized social-media censorship and demanded the companies do more of it, giving a preview of the type of internet controls that might be coming if they control the Senate. "There's no both sides when one side has chosen to reject truth," said Illinois Sen. Tammy Duckworth.

Republicans missed opportunities to make a case for why robust political exchange is in the interest of all Americans, regardless of their party. Three asked the CEOs about the political ideologies of their employees. Everyone knows they lean left, so this isn't much of a gotcha, and it sounds like special pleading.

Some Senators did effectively puncture the fiction that Twitter censors in good faith without regard to political ideology. Mississippi Sen. Roger Wicker pointed out that Twitter took two months to add a warning label to Chinese propaganda suggesting the U.S. military brought the coronavirus to China. Colorado Sen. Cory Gardner compared Twitter's tolerance for the Iranian Ayatollah's violent tweets with its lavish regulation of the U.S. President's account.

Mr. Dorsey said that Twitter's Beijing-like blackout of the New York Post story was the result of a "hacked materials policy," but he admitted to Wisconsin Sen. Ron Johnson that he had no

evidence of Russian interference or fabrication. He told Texas Sen. Ted Cruz that the policy of blocking links was “incorrect, and we changed it within 24 hours.”

Yet a Twitter representative emailed a press memo on Tuesday ahead of the hearing that seemed to boast of Twitter’s blackout. It quoted tweets by two officials at the German Marshall Fund—a Washington think-tank that advocates more political suppression on social media—praising the decision to censor the story.

Does Twitter’s CEO have control over the policy? Or does the company simply want to blunt the political heat for its suppression, on false pretenses, of newsworthy information about the possible future First Family—even as it signals to the conformity caucus in the mainstream media that it’s on their side?

You know American civics education has failed when those baying for political controls on citizens’ expression claim to be champions of democracy. Yes, it’s important that false statements be identified. Political campaigns have always been a collection of truths and half-truths, and journalists and the American people generally work it out.

As tech companies have retreated from their free-speech support in recent years, Americans have not grown any less polarized. We suspect Mr. Dorsey’s philosophy of censorship will lead to more conspiratorial thinking and ultimately corrode the American liberal values that allowed Silicon Valley to thrive.